Laboratory increases shipments of waste to WIPP repository

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Seven-week campaign, seven days a week, will eliminate backlog

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, February 11, 2010—In a seven-week push starting this week, Los Alamos National Laboratory will nearly double its number of weekly shipments to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, NM, Lab officials said today. The campaign will eliminate LANL's existing backlog of approximately 1,500 drums of legacy transuranic waste awaiting shipment to WIPP.

The campaign became possible through cooperation across the DOE complex. A mobile loading crew from Oak Ridge National Laboratory will move temporarily to LANL to double the Lab's loading capacity. The loading facility will move to a seven-day operation, up from the normal five days per week.

"This will clear our decks of the backlog," said Jim Blankenhorn, LANL's program director for waste disposition. "This opportunity became available, and we're happy to support the national program to safely dispose of transuranic waste."

LANL normally completes four shipments per week to WIPP. During this campaign, that number will increase to seven.

WIPP officials have already notified state agencies and stakeholders along the route to WIPP.

"This is a great example of cooperation-- across the DOE complex and within New Mexico," said George Rael, environmental projects manager at NNSA's Los Alamos Site Office. "It's this kind of teamwork that will help both LANL and WIPP meet their environmental responsibilities."

LANL has an estimated 10,000 containers in aboveground storage, awaiting processing and eventual shipment to WIPP. The containers must be removed from LANL's Technical Area 54 before cleanup can be completed. Under an agreement with the state of New Mexico, that cleanup must be complete by the end of 2015.